THE ROAD TO CIVIL WAR

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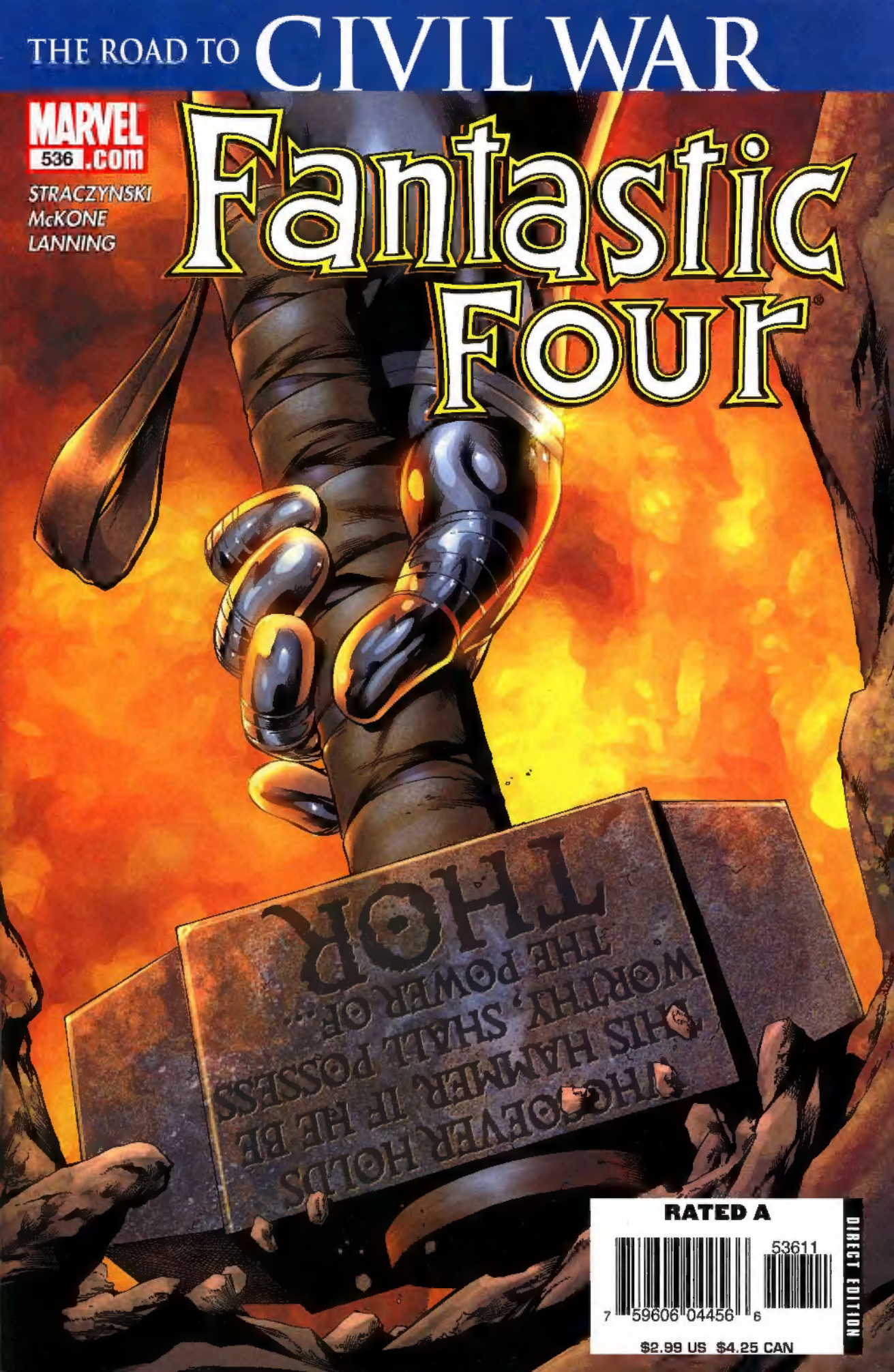
Fantastic Four



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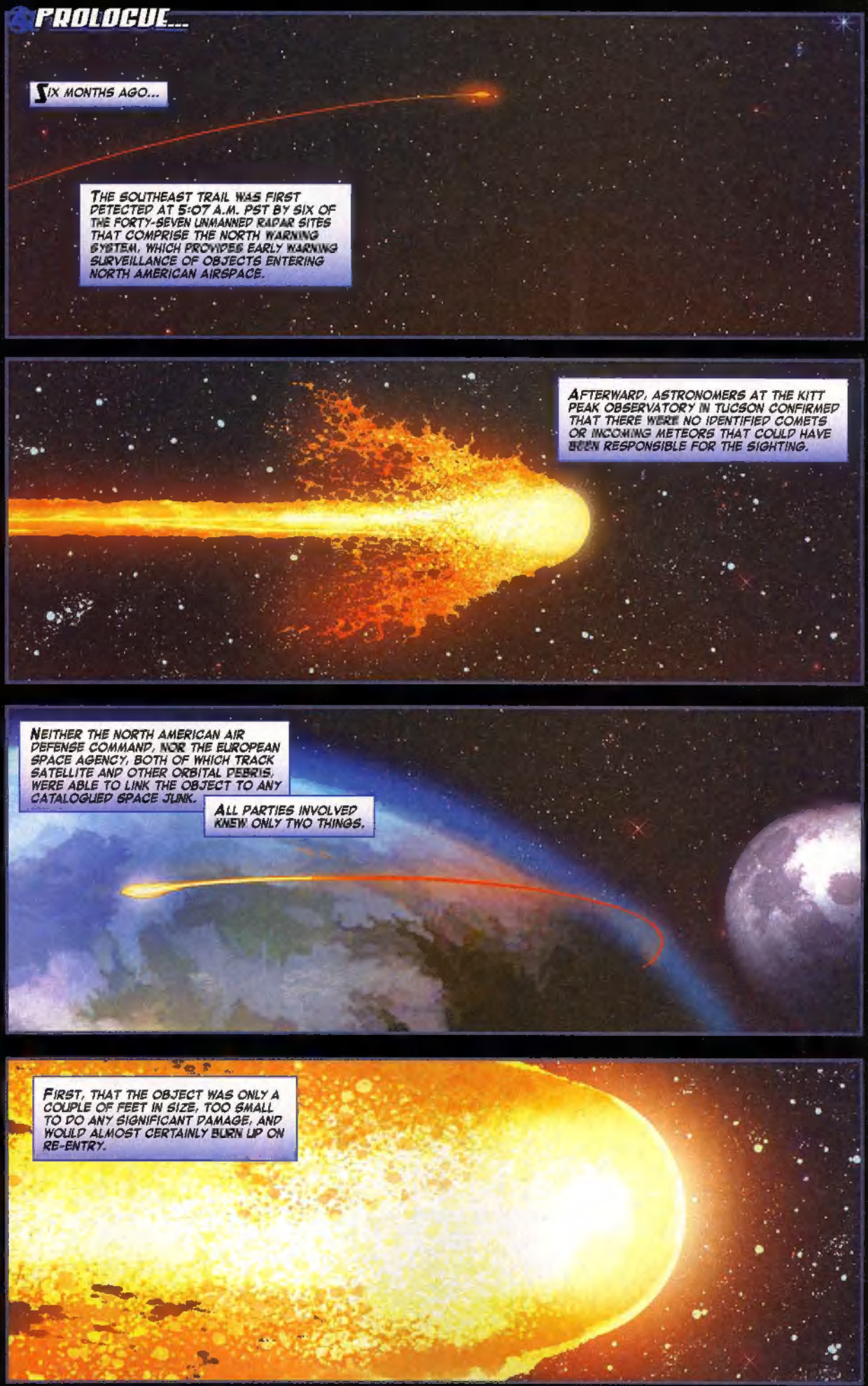
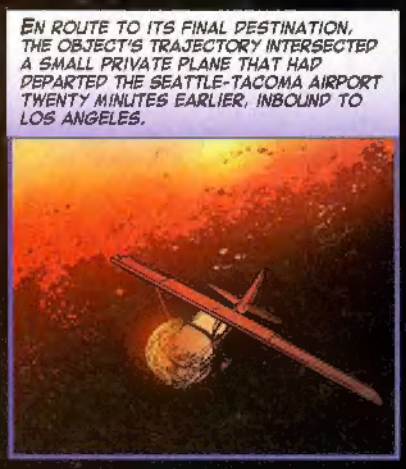

PROLOGUE...
SIX MONTHS AGO...
THE SOUTHEAST TRAIL WAS FIRST DETECTED AT 5:07 A.M. PST BY SIX OF THE FORTY-SEVEN UNMANNED RADAR SITES THAT COMPRISE THE NORTH WARNING SYSTEM, WHICH PROVIDES EARLY WARNING SURVEILLANCE OF OBJECTS ENTERING NORTH AMERICAN AIRSPACE.
AFTERWARD, ASTRONOMERS AT THE KITT PEAK OBSERVATORY IN TUCSON CONFIRMED THAT THERE WERE NO IDENTIFIED COMETS OR INCOMING METEORS THAT COULD HAVE BEEN RESPONSIBLE FOR THE SIGHTING.
NEITHER THE NORTH AMERICAN AIR DEFENSE COMMAND, NOR THE EUROPEAN SPACE AGENCY, BOTH OF WHICH TRACK SATELLITE AND OTHER ORBITAL DEBRIS, WERE ABLE TO LINK THE OBJECT TO ANY CATALOGUED SPACE JUNK.
ALL PARTIES INVOLVED KNEW ONLY TWO THINGS.
FIRST, THAT THE OBJECT WAS ONLY A COUPLE OF FEET IN SIZE, TOO SMALL TO DO ANY SIGNIFICANT DAMAGE, AND WOULD ALMOST CERTAINLY BURN UP ON RE-ENTRY.


EN ROUTE TO ITS FINAL DESTINATION, THE OBJECT'S TRAJECTORY INTERSECTED A SMALL PRIVATE PLANE THAT HAD DEPARTED THE SEATTLE-TACOMA AIRPORT TWENTY MINUTES EARLIER, INBOUND TO LOS ANGELES.

The HAMMER FALLS

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SPECIAL THANKS TO BRIAN MICHAEL BENDIS, ALEX MALEEV AND DAVE STEWART

Fantastic Four (ISSN #0274-5291) No. 536, May 2006. Published Monthly by MARVEL PUBLISHING, INC., a subsidiary of MARVEL ENTERTAINMENT, INC. OFFICE OF PUBLICATION: 417 5th Avenue, New York, NY 10016. PERIODICALS POSTAGE PAID AT NEW YORK, NY AND AT ADDITIONAL MAILING OFFICES. © 2006 Marvel Characters, Inc. All rights reserved. All characters featured in this issue and the distinctive names and likenesses thereof, and all related indicia are trademarks of Marvel Characters, Inc. No similarity between any of the names, characters, persons, and/or institutions in this magazine with those of any living or dead person or institution is intended, and any such similarity which may exist is purely coincidental. $2.99 per copy in the U.S. and $4.25 in Canada (GST #R127032852) through the newsstand; Canadian Agreement #40668537. Printed in the USA. Subscription rate (U.S. dollars) for 12 issues: U.S. $26.00; Canada $37.00; Foreign $38.00. POSTMASTER: SEND ALL ADDRESS CHANGES TO Fantastic Four, C/O MARVEL SUBSCRIPTION DEPT. P.O. BOX 30520 SALT LAKE CITY, UT 84130-0520. TELEPHONE # (800) 217-9158. FAX # (801) 228-0877. subscriptions@marvelsubs.com. AVI ARAD, Chief Creative Officer; ALAN FINE, President & CEO of Marvel Toys and Marvel Publishing, Inc.; DAVID BOGART, VP of Publishing Operations; DAN CARR, Executive Director of Publishing Technology; JUSTIN F. GABRIE, Managing Editor; STAN LEE, Chairman Emeritus. For information regarding advertising in Marvel Comics or on Marvel.com, please contact Jon Moisan, Advertising Director, at jmoisan@marvel.com or 212-576-8631. For Marvel subscription inquiries, please call 800-217-9158.

SIX MONTHS LATER...
RIGHT NOW.
CNN, AMERICA'S MOST TRUSTED NETWORK.
WELL, IT'S A LITTLE AFTER FOUR A.M. HERE IN ATLANTA, AND HERE ARE THE HEADLINES.
I DIDN'T HEAR YOU COME IN.
I DIDN'T WANT TO WAKE YOU.
OBVIOUSLY.
SO HOW DID IT GO?

HOW DID IT GO?
YOU EVER NOTICE THAT YOU ALWAYS REPEAT MY QUESTION WHEN YOU WANT TO BUY TIME TO THINK OF A GOOD ANSWER?
I REPEAT YOUR QUESTIONS TO BUY TIME?
REED--
IT'S--I WAS JUST--
--TRFYING TR HAPH A THANDWITH.
ANSWERS FIRST, THEN FOOD.
REED, THIS ISN'T LIKE YOU WENT OUT BOWLING WITH THE BOYS. YOU SAID THIS WAS IMPORTANT.
IT WAS... IT IS.
SO? HOW DID IT GO?
HOW DID IT GO...?
WHY ARE YOU EVEN *HERE*, NAMOR?

HE WAS INVITED.
I KNOW WE AGREED NOT TO DO THIS ANY MORE, BUT SOMETHING LARGER THAN ANY ISSUES WE HAVE IS ON THE HORIZON...
... AND IF I DIDN'T COME TO YOU WITH IT, I WOULD NOT BE ABLE TO LIVE WITH MYSELF.
THIS IS AN EARLY DRAFT OF A BILL THAT WILL HIT THE FLOOR OF THE UNITED STATES CONGRESS IN A MONTH OR TWO.
IT WAS SLIPPED TO ME UNDER THE TABLE.
IT'S THE SUPER HERO REGISTRATION ACT.
ANYONE WITH POWERS--ANYONE IN COSTUME--ANY MUTANT--
--ANY OF OUR KIND IS GOING TO BE REQUIRED BY LAW TO REVEAL THEMSELVES TO THE UNITED STATES GOVERNMENT.
IN RETURN, THE REGISTERED HERO WILL BE GIVEN A JOB AS A GUARD IN THE NEW S.H.I.E.L.D. WORLD SECURITY FORCE. YOU WILL STILL GET TO BE A SUPER HERO, BUT YOU'LL HAVE TO ANSWER TO SOMEONE.
REFUSING TO DO SO WILL BE CONSIDERED A FEDERAL CRIME.
THE FEELING IS THAT OTHER COUNTRIES WILL FOLLOW SUIT.
BUT THAT THE UNITED STATES WILL BE LEADING THE WAY AND THAT THIS BILL WILL PASS.
IF A PERSON WEARS A MASK, HOW WILL THEY KNOW WHO TO--?
S.H.I.E.L.D. IS DEVELOPING A SPECIAL UNIT TO HUNT DOWN ANYONE FLAGRANTLY DISOBEYING THE LAW.
WELL, THAT'S JUST DISGUSTING.
AND I THINK WE SHOULD ALL VOLUNTARILY SUPPORT AND OBEY THIS ACT BEFORE IT EVEN GOES TO A VOTE.
WE SHOULD HAPPILY COME OUT IN FAVOR OF IT.
FOR MORE ON THIS MYSTERIOUS MEETING, SEE THIS MONTH'S NEW AVENGERS: ILLUMINATI SPECIAL!

"WE SHOULD COOPERATE NOW, BEFORE IT GETS UGLY, BEFORE SOMEONE OR EVERYONE IS MADE AN EXAMPLE OF."
WE ALL AGREED THAT THERE ARE SOME...VERY BAD TIMES COMING.
AS FOR WHAT TO DO ABOUT IT, THERE WAS--
--WELL, LET'S JUST SAY THERE WAS SOME DISAGREEMENT.
BUT IN THE LONG RUN, I'M SURE WE'LL BE ABLE TO PUT OUR DIFFERENCES BEHIND US.
MEANWHILE, IN THE NATION'S CAPITAL--

--INDUSTRIALIST TONY STARK LEFT WASHINGTON LATE YESTERDAY AFTER TESTIFYING IN CLOSED SESSION BEFORE THE SENATE SELECT COMMITTEE ON SUPERHUMAN RELATIONS.
WHEN ASKED TO COMMENT ON SPECULATION ABOUT THE POSSIBILITY OF A SUPERHUMAN REGISTRATION ACT IN LIGHT OF RECENT TRAGIC EVENTS, STARK WAS UNCHARACTERISTICALLY VAGUE.

THE COMMITTEE AND I HAD A GOOD MEETING, AND WE DISCUSSED SOME OPTIONS THAT, AS FAR AS I KNOW, ARE STILL JUST THAT... OPTIONS.
COME ON, PETER... WE HAVE PLACES TO BE.
RIGHT, BOSS.

THEY WOULDN'T... I MEAN, YOU DON'T THINK THE GOVERNMENT IS REALLY GOING TO--
IT'S JUST ELECTION-YEAR POSTURING, THAT'S ALL. THEY WANT TO GET EVERYONE ON BOTH SIDES HEATED UP SO THEY'LL GO TO THE POLLS IN NOVEMBER.
SUE--
IT'S NOT THAT SIMPLE, I--

--CAN YOU READ US, REPEAT, DR. RICHARDS, CAN YOU READ US--
WHAT THE--?
THAT'S COMING IN ON THE EMERGENCY DISTRESS FREQUENCY I GAVE S.H.I.E.L.D....NOBODY ELSE IS SUPPOSED TO HAVE IT.
THIS IS DR. RICHARDS. IDENTIFY YOURSELF.
THANK GOD, DZZZRICHARDS, WE NEEZZZZR HELP, GOT THIS FREQUENCYZZZOM S.H.I.E.L.D. HQ, THEY CAN'T GET HERE IN TIME--
THIS IS GENERAL WILLZZM RAY. EMERGENCY. YZZ'RE OURZZZPE. I SAY AGAIN, YOU'RE OUR ONLY HOPE.
NATZZZAL SECURITY... EMERGENCY... ONLY YOU CAN--
WHAT IS IT? WHAT'S HAPPENED?
TWO MINUTES, TEN SECONDS LATER.
BEN, UP AND AT 'EM. WE NEED TO BE IN THE AIR IN FIVE MINUTES.
FOUR MINUTES, FIFTY SECONDS.
...YER KIDDING ME....
IN THE AIR? WHERE'RE WE GOIN'?
OKLAHOMA.
OKLAHOMA...? WE'RE GOIN' TA OKLAHOMA?
ON PURPOSE?
THREE MINUTES THIRTY SECONDS.

"BUT THERE'S NUTHIN' IN OKLAHOMA."
PRIVATE PROPERTY
-NO TRESPASSING-
USE OF LETHAL FORCE AUTHORIZED
"THAT'S WHERE YOU'RE WRONG, BEN--
"--DEAD WRONG."

SIR! GETTING REPORTS OF MORE ENEMY FORCES CLOSING AT NORTHWEST PERIMETER!
GET BRAVO UNIT OVER THERE *NOW!* WE HAVE TO KEEP THEM AWAY FROM THE DOME AT ALL COSTS!
SIR, FIELD COMMAND SAYS NOTHING SEEMS TO STOP THE INTRUDERS--
THAT'S BECAUSE THEY CAN'T *BE* STOPPED. NOT BY OUR FORCES, THAT'S FOR DAMNED SURE.
"S.H.I.E.L.D. CAN'T GET HERE IN TIME... SAME FOR CONVENTIONAL GROUND FORCES...BUT I'M NOT SURE IT WOULD MATTER, NOT AGAINST *THEM*--
"--NOT AGAINST DOOMBOTS."
STAND ASIDE FOR THE GLORY THAT IS DOOM!
STAND ASIDE FOR THE GLORY THAT IS DOOM!
STAND ASIDE FOR THE GLORY THAT IS DOOM!

DOOMBOTS? HAS TH' PROVISIONAL LATVERIAN GOVERNMENT LOST ITS MIND?
YEAH...STAGING [redacted] ATTACK LIKE THIS ON [redacted] SOIL SO SOON AFTER THE LAST TIME, THEY'VE GOT TO BE--
DESPERATE.
OR [redacted]
SO DETERMINED TO GET WHATEVER'S BEING STUDIED AT THAT RESEARCH INSTALLATION THAT THEY'D [redacted] REPROGRAMMING THEIR LEFTOVER DOOMBOTS [redacted] TO ATTACK IT.
I CAN'T BELIEVE THEY WOULDN'T TELL YOU WHAT THEY'RE STUDYING DOWN THERE...
WE CAN DEAL WITH THAT LATER, SUE. RIGHT NOW--
--I'D SAY WE HAVE BIGGER FISH TO FRY

AND ABOUT FREAKING TIME.
FLAME ON!
YEAH, YEAH, WHATEVER.
BETTER GET CLEAR, PALS, THIS IS BETWEEN ME AND THIS REJECT FROM TOYS-R-US.
I SHOULD HAVE EXPECTED YOU WOULD BE HERE, GRIMM.
WHUMP
GOOD. THEN LIKE THE KIDS SAY--
--LET'S GET THIS PARTY STARTED!

KER-WHAMMMMM!

YOU THERE! LIEUTENANT!
SIR!
WHERE'S GENERAL RAY?
IN THE COMMAND CENTER, SIR! I'LL GET HIM!
GOOD IDEA--
--BECAUSE I THINK WE'RE GOING TO BE A BIT TIED UP HERE FOR A WHILE.
THERE'S SO MANY, REED...IT LOOKS AS IF THEY'VE USED EVERY DOOMBOT THEY HAD LEFT FOR THIS ONE ASSAULT. WHATEVER THEY'RE AFTER--
BACK OFF!
--IT MUST ■ PRETTY IMPORTANT TO RISK ALL THIS.
FOOLISH, TO BELIEVE YOU COULD STAND BEFORE DOOM AND HIS--
--GOAL...?

A PALTRY DEFENSE THAT WILL HAVE NO LONG-TERM HOPE OF SAVING ANY OF YOU...
TWO DOWN, NOW TO--
--UNNNGGGHH!
YOUR EXCESSIVE CONFIDENCE HAS ALWAYS BEEN YOUR DOWNFALL, STORM.
YOU TALK PRETTY GOOD... FOR A PILE OF GEARS AND OLD MOTOR OIL.

ANY FINAL WORDS INSECT?
YEAH... JUST THIS...
HOW ABOUT A LITTLE FIRE, SCARECROW?
VWOOOSH

ANY... FINAL...FINAL WORDS--
TAP. TAP
THANKS, BEN...THAT'LL BUY ME JUST ENOUGH TIME TO--
FLAME ON!

WHAT THE...WHY'D YOU DO THAT?
WELL, YER ALWAYS ANNOUNCING WHEN YOUR FREAKING FLAME COMES ON, SO SHOULDN'T SOMEBODY MAKE AN ANNOUNCEMENT WHEN YER OUTTA GAS?
YOU'RE SUCH A YUTZ.
HEY, I'M STILL WAITING FOR YA TA YELL PUBERTY ON!
HOWDY, FELLAS... SO IN THE FANCY HERO PHRASE BOOK, WHICH DO YOU PREFER?
FLAME ON, OR--
--IT'S CLOBBERIN' TIME!
TM, COPYRIGHTED, PATENT PENDING, SUPPLIES LIMITED, ORDER NOW, OFFER NOT VALID IN SOME STATES.

DR. RICHARDS...YOU HAVE NO IDEA HOW GLAD WE ARE TO SEE YOU. NOW WE'VE GOT A CHANCE TO--
I'M NOT SO SURE.
WHAT DO YOU--
I'M NOT SEEING MUCH OF A TACTICAL INTENT BEHIND THIS BATTLE.
INSTEAD OF DRIVING TOWARD THE BASE, THE LATVERIANS HAVE THEIR FORCES FIGHTING SKIRMISHES ON THE PERIMETER.
THERE MUST BE A PATTERN I'M NOT SEEING. CAN YOU GET ME A TACTICAL DISPLAY OF THE BATTLEFIELD?
NO CAN DO, DR. RICHARDS. WE LOST OUR GPS SYSTEM WHEN THE RADAR SYSTEM WAS BLOWN OUT.
WHAT?
THE FIRST WAVE TOOK OUT OUR MAJOR RADAR AND BATTLEFIELD IMAGING SYSTEMS.
ARE ANY OF THE SYSTEMS STILL WORKING?
NO...WE LOST THE LAST ONE ABOUT TWO MINUTES AGO.

OH, NO...
TELL YOUR MEN TO GET AS FAR FROM THE LAB AS POSSIBLE.
BUT--
NO!
DOWN! EVERYBODY DOWN!

BA-DOOOM!
IS EVERYONE... IS EVERYONE ALL RIGHT?
I THINK SO, I--
THE LAB...THEY'VE DESTROYED THE WHOLE THING, LEAVING BEHIND JUST A CRATER.

NOT ENTIRELY CORRECT, DR. RICHARDS.
THAT VOICE--!
WHAT IS IN THAT CRATER FELL FROM THE SKY SIX MONTHS AGO...THOUGH IT TOOK MY SOURCES WITHIN YOUR GOVERNMENT MONTHS TO PROVIDE ME WITH THE EXACT COORDINATES.
DOOM! BUT, IT'S--IT'S NOT POSSIBLE!
SIX MONTHS WHILE THEY TRIED IN VAIN TO MOVE THAT WHICH CANNOT BE MOVED, EXCEPT BY SOMEONE WORTHY OF THE TASK..
THAT WHICH BELONGS RIGHTLY AND SOLELY TO VICTOR VON DOOM, THE POWER AND THE FORCE REQUIRED TO SECURE, ONCE AND FOR ALL, MY MASTERY OVER ALL NATIONS.
NO...OH, NO...IT CAN'T BE...

TO BE CONTINUED...